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RUEHDO/AMEMBASSY DOHA 0549

RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0611

RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 2154

RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0959

RUEHPG/AMEMBASSY PRAGUE 0184

RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0627

RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 0629

RUEHDS/USMISSION USAU ADDIS ABABA

RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS

RHMFISS/COMSOCOEUR VAIHINGEN GE

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1068

RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NOUAKCHOTT 000289

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL KDEM PHUM KPAO

SUBJECT: MAURITANIA: POLITICAL ROUNDUP FOR THE WEEK OF
APRIL 19-23

REF: A. NOUAKCHOTT 282

1B. NOUAKCHOTT 284

1C. 08 NOUAKCHOTT 773

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Dennis Hankins for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (SBU) Summary: For the week of April 19-23, women protesting against the junta were dispersed by the police. Election planning continued apace, while the number of declared presidential candidates grew to six. Anti-coup parliamentarians staged a sit-in at the National Assembly, while the new interim president Ba M'Bare maintained a low profile. End summary.

12. (SBU) Joint FNDD/RFD declaration: On April 16, the FNDD and RFD issued their second-ever joint declaration. The declaration contained their four requirements for a successful Senegalese mediation: (1) the immediate cessation of election planning; (2) the liberation of all political prisoners; (3) respect for all "public liberties" and the opening up of public media for all parties; (4) recognition that the communique issued by the International Contact Group on February 20 in Paris and all previously passed AU resolutions regarding Mauritania are the only basis for any subsequent dialogue.

13. (C) Mayor of Atar turns pro-coup: PolOff met April 18 with mayor of Atar Sid'Ahmed Ould H'Meymed, who was disappointed at what he perceives as the US's failure to fulfill its promises in Atar and implied that the U.S. had taken advantage of his hospitality without giving anything in return. Ould H'Meymed accused the US of encouraging the coup and now "going radical" by suspending all its programs in Mauritania. The mayor intimated that he was "starting to like Aziz" because the General was waging a war against traditional lobbies and corruption and had increased the efficiency of the administration. He stated Aziz would win the election in a campaign financed by businessman Ould Bouamatou and would potentially stay in power for the next thirty years because Mauritania needs a strong man at its reins. According to H'Meymed, the U.S. would have no other option but to accept reality like everybody else. He requested that the U.S. thinks about the needs of the population instead of punishing Mauritanians unjustly for "political wars" that were beyond their understanding.

¶4. (SBU) Repression of women protesters: A group of women politicians from the FNDD and RFD protested against the coup in front of the United Nations building April 19 (two years to the day after President Abdallahi's inauguration). They delivered a letter addressed to UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, and waved anti-coup posters such as "UNILATERAL AGENDA -- LEADING THE COUNTRY INTO AN ABYSS." The peaceful sit-in was broken up by the police, who used batons to strike the women, some of whom were taken to the hospital. The event received extensive media coverage from both local and international news outlets. Al Jazeera's nightly "Maghreb Roundup" led with the story April 19, showing women being manhandled by police. One clip showed RFD Parliamentarian Nana Mint Cheikhna being pushed around by police as she shouted into the microphone "We oppose dictatorship!"

Comment: Women being abused by policemen, while not exactly looked upon favorably elsewhere, plays especially poorly in Mauritania. Some representative comments on news sites were "Shame on the junta!" and "This takes us back 10 years -- we strongly condemn this act by Aziz's dogs." End comment.

¶5. (C) Women protests, continued: PolAsst met April 22 with APP Parliamentarian Maalouma Mint Bilal (who is also the wife of prominent human rights and anti-slavery activist Boubacar Ould Messaoud). Bilal participated in the women's sit-in at the UN Headquarters. She stated 300 women were present at the demonstration. (Comment: Based on pictures and television coverage of the event, this figure seems a little high. End comment.) She said the police used batons to

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disperse the crowd, but did not use tear gas (almost all media outlets reported that tear gas was used). She herself was only hit once (not by a baton) on the right shoulder, and not severely. Bilal did describe, however, women being grabbed by four policemen (2 for the arms, 2 for the legs) and forcibly removed from the front of UN headquarters. She stated that three women were taken to the hospital, and condemned the fact that media were never allowed into the hospital to adequately cover the wounded after police suppressed demonstrations. Looking more broadly at the situation, Bilal saw increased protests, marches, and sit-ins as the way forward, and described planning for several more rallies that were in the works. For example, the FNDD was trying to coordinate with RFD a series of rallies to be held every Sunday at a different location (Senate, Constitutional Council, Palais de Justice, Dar Naim prison, etc.). She praised the US for its strong anti-coup position, and expressed deep disappointment in the French. She called for the US to lean on its European allies as much as possible to make them come around to a more anti-coup position. Finally, she requested that the Embassy consider sending at least one or two observers to future anti-coup marches or demonstrations. "The press here is not well-developed," she said, and it is hard to get out the "real story" of what happens during anti-coup events.

¶6. (SBU) The French "rectify": A spokesman in the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that his country remains committed to the International Contact Group decision that calls for a consensual solution to the Mauritanian crisis. He also said that Aziz's unilateral electoral calendar does not constitute a valid solution to that crisis.

¶7. (SBU) NGOs highlight an increase in rapes: The Association of Women Heads of Household recorded 150 cases of rape in March. Aminetou Mint Moctar, its president, called for a mass mobilization to coordinate government efforts against rape in Mauritania.

¶8. (SBU) Election planning continues: Presidents of CENI departmental commissions were appointed on April 15. The electoral interministerial committee met April 20 for an update on election planning. 67,433 new voters have been registered. To date, 26,449 Mauritanians living abroad have

also registered to vote. Computers necessary to process electoral lists have been purchased as well as urns, ink, stamps and electoral kits.

¶19. (SBU) New hotline: A communique released by DGSN chief General Hadi and printed in the April 19 edition of the state-run "Horizons" newspaper announced a new phone hotline. Staffed 24 hours a day, it is there to answer "any emergency calls or for passing along any facts relating to threats to national security."

¶10. (C) Meeting with Daddah: Charge and PolAsst met with RFD President Ahmed Ould Daddah April 19 (Ref A).

¶11. (C) Meeting with Constitutional Council: Charge and PolOff met with the Constitutional Council April 20 (Ref B).

¶12. (SBU) Politicians participate in open debate about elections: POL FSN attended a political debate April 19 organized by the Emjad Center for Culture and Communication to discuss positions about the elections. Participants included political actors from pro- and anti-coup parties, including representatives of the FNDD, RFD, High State Council, and AJD-MR. The debate received wide press coverage but was ignored by official state-run press, radio and television.

¶13. (SBU) Candidate list takes shape: General Aziz submitted his presidential candidacy dossier to the Constitutional Council on April 20. Ibrahima Sarr and Hamidou Baba Kane (both Afro-Mauritanians) followed shortly thereafter. The candidacy of Sghair Ould M'Barek, a

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Haratine, ensured that there would be at least one candidate from each major social group (White Moors, Black Moors or "Haratin," and Afro-Mauritanians). Two other candidates (Isselmou Ould Moustapha and Sidi Mohamed Ould Ghaouth, both relative unknowns) submitted their dossiers literally at the last minute, just before midnight on April 22. Although widely rumored to be likely candidates, neither Saleh Ould Hanena nor Zein Ould Zeidane submitted a candidacy. Also, no female candidate came forth. Comment: Aziz was able to assemble some "token" candidates in an attempt to give some legitimacy to the elections, but none of the other candidates have enough of a following or the financial resources to mount a serious challenge. All the political heavyweights (e.g., Daddah, Boulkheir, Vall, Zeidane) are either openly boycotting the elections, or declined to submit a candidacy. End comment.

¶14. (C) Aziz's security lacking: While driving past the Atlantic Hotel on the afternoon of April 21, ARSO observed the former head of the HSC, General Aziz, leaving the hotel. A small crowd of approximately three dozen people was present, and there was an additional squad of National Guard deployed at the Egyptian Embassy, immediately across the street from the Atlantic Hotel. It was readily apparent that not all of the crowd's members were supporters of Aziz, and two women were seen blocking his car with a banner as it tried to leave. Aziz's entire security detail appeared to consist of no more than four people (including the car's driver, as well as one additional person waiting at Aziz's house, one block north). After observing their response to a small, but agitated, crowd of protesters, as well as their general lack of coordination of planning, ARSO believes that the members of Aziz's protective detail have either little or no formal training or experience in close protection. Comment: Several media outlets have also reported, and RSO has obtained information, that Aziz stays in a different place each night. If true, it shows a certain level of concern (or paranoia) in the Aziz camp for his safety. End comment.

¶15. (SBU) Parliamentary sit-in: Anti-coup parliamentarians held a press conference and staged a sit-in at the National

Assembly April 22. This was the first time National Assembly President Messaoud Ould Boulkheir had sat in the President's chair at the Assembly since the coup. RFD President Ahmed Ould Daddah, UFP President Mohamed Ould Maouloud, and RFD parliamentarian Nana Mint Cheikhna all delivered speeches, but Boulkheir delivered the strongest one of all, saying "We will sacrifice our blood and our lives if necessary, to thwart these elections." The event was the lead story on the April 22 edition of Al Jazeera's nightly "Maghreb Roundup."

¶16. (SBU) The phantom president: Ba M'Bare has not appeared much in official state-run media, which is careful to always use the cumbersome title "President of the Senate, Interim President of the Republic," instead of just "President of the Republic" (which he supposedly is). He has made no speeches thus far, and what appearances he does make in the media are limited to receiving delegations and shaking the hands of emissaries. Several local news outlets reported that portraits of General Aziz remain hanging in government offices -- not the portrait of Ba M'Bare. However, the official web site of the High State Council (www.hce.mr) was quick to remove Aziz from the lineup of generals and colonels on the front page images.

¶17. (C) Meeting with Vall: Charge and PolOff met with Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall at his residence April 22 (Septel).

HANKINS